

THE RACCOON, *PROCYON LOTOR*, IN WYOMING

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ABSTRACT.— Recent distribution maps show raccoon as occupying only the extreme eastern-northeastern portion of Wyoming. However, there is substantial evidence that raccoon are common throughout Wyoming and currently inhabit all the major and many of the minor drainages throughout Wyoming.

The distribution of the raccoon, *Procyon lotor*, has changed rather dramatically in the past few years in Wyoming. Long (1965) recorded that it was present in only five eastern and northeastern counties of Wyoming in 1965. In more recent years, however, evidence has accumulated suggesting that raccoon range is on the increase in the state. Hoffmann, Wright, and Newby (1969) described several localities in adjoining Montana from which raccoon had been taken. Although Hall's (1981) summary showed nearby records in adjacent areas of Idaho, Utah, and Colorado, he also indicated no raccoon localities in central and western Wyoming. Clark, Saab, and Casey (1980) in their review of Wyoming mammal literature likewise presented no new citations on current raccoon distribution. Lotze and Anderson (1979) presented no range extensions.

Dale Weston, a rancher in rural Sage (20 miles south, 2 miles west, Cokeville), Lincoln Co., trapped a raccoon during the winter of 1980–1981. He communicated instances of road kills and had knowledge of trappers who had taken raccoon locally. Upon further inquiry, including written and verbal communication with several fur dealers in western and central Wyoming, we found that the raccoon is presently a common mammal throughout the state and has been for some time, especially the past 5 to 15 years.

Matt Failoni, a fur buyer from Kemmerer, Lincoln Co., stated that he had purchased 51 raccoon pelts around the Kemmerer area in the past five years. James Cook, a fur dealer in Evanston, Uintah Co., had purchased ap-

proximately 20 raccoon each year for the past five years.

Recently, Charles Neely, a fur buyer and trapper from Pinedale, Sublette Co., personally trapped 12 raccoon. Due to the paucity of trappers in that area, fewer raccoon have been taken than might otherwise be expected. Beaver trappers occasionally have taken raccoon, but, due to the reduced prices of pelts, fewer beaver traps have been set. Mr. Neely recounted that although few local Pinedale residents raise chickens, every one has called him and complained about raccoon harassment. Mr. Neely further said that his uncle trapped a raccoon locally 30–35 years ago, but in only the past five or so years have numbers of animals increased appreciably. He estimated that extant distribution of raccoon averages one for every three to four miles of creek and river bottom, a total of 30 to 40 raccoons within a 20 mile radius of Pinedale. Mr. Neely suggested that raccoons might have immigrated into the Pinedale area from the south up the Green River drainage system.

Jake Korell, Riverton, Fremont Co., purchased approximately 300 raccoon pelts during the 1981–1982 season and an average of 450 for each of the previous five years, or a total of about 2000 animals. Mr. Korell stated that 46 years ago there were no raccoon in the Riverton area, that they first appeared about 30 years ago. He suggested that contemporary local populations originated both from accidental liberation of pet raccoons by a Missouri family and also from immigration of wild raccoon up local drainage systems.

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Mr. Korell also said that the severe winter of 1978-1979 caused significant mortality, that present numbers were down somewhat.

Herman Genz, Rawlins, Carbon Co., trapped and purchased about eight raccoon during the past five years. He caught none in the 1981-1982 fur season, but trapped two or three per year in previous years in the Pass Creek area; he also purchased seven or eight local raccoon in the past five years.

Ronald Yates, a statewide fur buyer from Casper, Natrona Co., purchased 300 raccoon pelts in the 1981-1982 season and approximately 1500 locally during the past five years. He also purchased about 50 in 1981-1982, 300 to 400 in the past five years, out of the Green River drainage system. He stated that raccoons are now being taken where none have been found previously. Mr. Yates stated unequivocally that raccoon are currently present in all of the major drainage systems in the state of Wyoming, bar none. Raccoon from the Snake River drainage are of especially high quality, and there seems to

be an abundance of animals along the Big Horn River in the general vicinity of Thermopolis, Hot Springs Co. He also suggested that the Shoshone River may well have served as a dispersal corridor into Wyoming from the Big Horn River, Montana, where, as a boy, he was aware of abundant raccoon populations.

In summary, there is strong evidence that significant populations of raccoon presently occur in areas of suitable habitat throughout the state of Wyoming.

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